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ABSTRACT

A free and pluralistic society is maintained by constitutional guarantees and an educated populace. Nigeria, like other nations in West Africa, spent billions of dollars and embarked on a program of mass educational improvement in the 1960's and 1970's. While secondary school enrollment increased eleven times between 1962 and 1975, over half the candidates on the West African Examinations Council secondary test failed. This indicates a failure of the Nigerian educational policy of "developmentalism," which states that centralized educational reform is the quickest and surest way to bring about modernization and an improved standard of living. While Nigerian school facilities and teacher training methods are often poor, they must not bear the full blame. Early mission schools and traditional Islamic schools had poor facilities and ill-trained teachers, yet they succeeded in providing effective basic education. Reasons for these more recent failures include the application of factory or industrial plant improvement strategies to education and the use of utilitarian (or purely quantitative) measures of success. (CFR)

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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTALISM IN NIGERIA:

EDUCATION FOR THE MASSES OR JUST MASS EDUCATION?

University of Sokoto Seminar

November, 1985

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In 1983 there was an impressive amount of education news in the media. The western papers and especially the American ones carried numerous articles on the strengths of educational programmes in various countries. There were often articles about strident, high-pressure schooling in Japan; and one read about the Soviet's extreme emphasis on science and mathematics education. It was the start of the run-up year to elections in the United States and suddenly there was a deluge of campaign rhetoric about education. Both the Democrats and the Republicans deplored the sorry state of American education vis-a-vis the educational strength of America's chief economic rival, Japan, and her chief ideological rival, the Soviet Union. Educational strength is an important national issue, more than just a matter of political hot-air. Even without comment on the relative strengths and weakmesses of education in the USSR, USA, and Japan, it is safe to say that the salience of these nations in world affairs today is in many ways due to the general access to high quality education that the citizens of these countries have. These governments wishing to maintain that international salience are eager thus to maintain and improve their educational systems. They realize that the education of their common people continues to open up a tremendous pool of talent; and that talent has brought great changes, especially economic ones. Brookings Institution economist Edward Denison attributes to increased schooling twenty percent of American productivity gains between 1948 and 1973. It was less than forty years ago that a defeated Imperial Japan lay in chaos and ruin, yet today her economic strength is rivaled only by the United States. Of course there are many factors contributing to

this rise but a primary one has to be a strong emphasis on literacy and modern science and technology education. Beyond economics a free and pluralistic society is maintained not just by constitutional guaranties, but by an educated populace which not only demands its rights but is able to utilize them. Thomas Jefferson put it very well, "the surest safeguard of a democracy is an enligthened citizenry."

Education was also much in the papers of African nations. The Nigerian papers continue to run many articles concerning the progress and development of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme launched in 1976; and now have picked up the take-off of a 10-year National Mass Literacy Campaign promoted by President Shehu Shagari. This programme is aimed at erasing adult illiteracy which according to the latest World Bank figures could still be as high as a regretable seventy percent of the adult (15 years and older) population of 45 million people. Briefly aside it should be noted that this is quite a conservative figure and as well one that refers only to English-language literacy. It includes neither those literate in Arabic nor those who are vernacularly literate; but such are not literate in the language of development.

Clearly such a high level of illiteracy (or even half that) is intolerable and stands in significant opposition to Nigerian aspirations. The value of literacy and much more of education in general is not lost on the leaders of Nigeria and the rest of the developing world. These nations are well aware of the economic, political and martial advantages of modern education and have placed it high on their national agendas. There is much dispute about the

various paths to development but there is little disagreement that education is a necessary component of a modern, economically developed state. It is a fundamental source of prosperity and international influence and competitiveness.

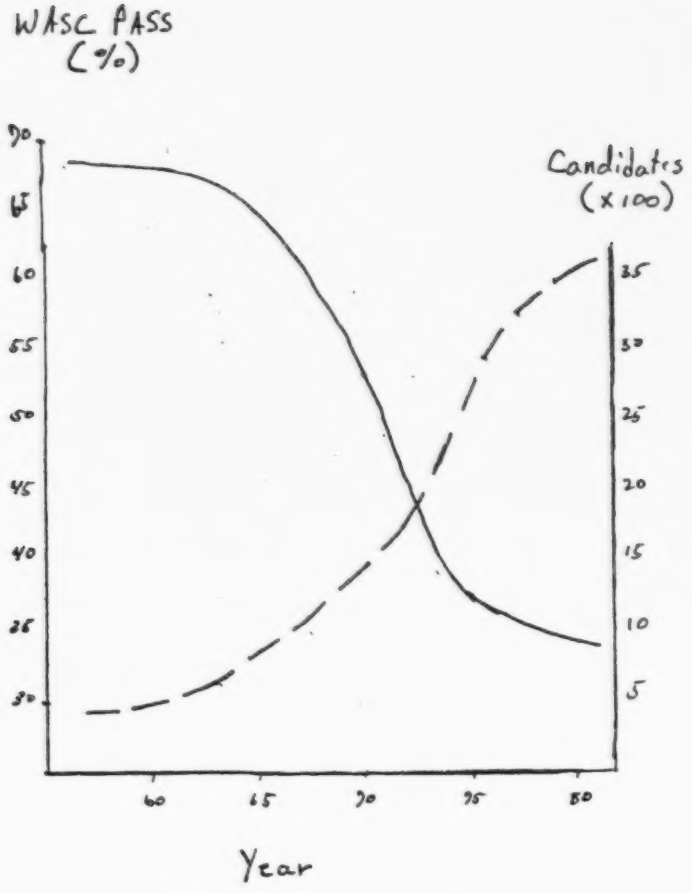
The Edu-business

It is not surprising then to find enormous sums of money spent annually for education whether it is in nations of the North or of the South. The industrialized nations of the West set aside each year an average of more than ten percent of their functional expenditures and Sub-Sahara nations more than fifteen percent. This translates into billions upon billions of dollars going toward the development and maintenance of what might be called the "edu-business." The purpose of this business is the mass education of people. The first point to be made here is that Mass Education and the education of the masses are not unfortunately one and the same thing. The current debates on American education are about this very point. Historically the Americans have prided themselves on providing a sound education for the common man. The education bureaucracy that made that boast teneable is now underfire because it seems that in recent years the education provided for the people has not been nearly so sound as one would have it. One has Mass Education without the corresponding education for the masses.

A nation like the USA can afford such educational lapses given its history of sound, extensive education, wealth and advanced technological state; but a developing nation like Nigeria can ill afford it. Yet this is the very same crisis that faces the Nigerian educational system. Billions of Naira have gone for education but

the results are far from encouraging. During the decade of the seventies WASC examination was routinely failed by over half of the candidates who sat for it. Nazi Vincent Ike one-time registrar of the West African Examinations Council said of the lowest 27 percent that they "...were incapable of reaching the lowest pass grade of C in even one single subject of the examination. And some of them entered for as many as nine subjects! Such a shocking result, at the time I did the school certificate examination, was enough to bar a candidate from appearing for the examination for a couple of years." The single area that has seen the greatest expansion in the edu-business has rightfully been the area of the northern states such as Sokoto. By 1975 the primary school enrolment of this area was three times the enrolment of 1962. During the same period secondary school enrolment was up eleven times the 1962 figure. This is supposed to indicate that a larger and larger number of people are receiving a good education. In absolute numbers this is perhaps true but certainly not in terms of percentages. In the northern area during the 1950's, 1960's and 70's the relationship between secondary school WASC candidates and the percentage of WASC passes was a negative 0.80; and the results during the first quarter of the eighties appear to be following suit. This relationship is dramatically visible in the following chart based on a sample of secondary schools in northern states.

INSERT CHART HERE



The Success Rate of WASC Candidates From 28 Sample Schools in Northern Nigeria

Educational Developmentalism

The rapid rise of Nigerian school enrolment is an intentional result of the national policy on education which is predicated on an educational philosophy called "developmentalism." This term coined in 1980 by the Nigerian Education Research Council refers to the role education plays in the economic and technological advancement of a nation. It is explicitely stated in the Nigerian Policy for Education that education is the quickest and surest way to bring about modernization.

Developmentalism is actually not a traditional educational philosophy but an economic one crafted for use by educational planners. A parallel is drawn between the development of natural resources and human resources. Nigeria has an abundance of natural resources which include petroleum, water, and arable land. From these resources the Nigerian leaders would like to produce wealth both for today and tomorrow. This wealth is desired so that Nigerians can enjoy a higher, healthier standard of living. It is also desired so that Nigerian opinion will carry more weight in international affairs. To produce this wealth, and particularily for the purpose of enhancing its international prestige, Nigeria's natural resources must be exploited by the most efficient means available. This necessarily means that modern agriculture, modern industry, and modern medicine must be employed (though not exclusively). Of course this kind of modernization can only be carried out by men and women with modern education and training. From the viewpoint of economic planners then people are actually a nation's primary resource. Just as the natural resource petroleum needs to be developed by refining into petrol

before it can be burned in automobiles, so people must be developed by education before they can be utilized in developing an independent, modern industrialized economy. Thus one has the philosophy of human resource development through education, i.e. developmentalism.

The Nigerian results have in part been impressive. Granted educational decisions are often politically motivated, politics aside, one can still site the rapid expansion of secondary education and women's education, UPE, the National Mass Literacy Campaign, and nineteen or more federal universities to the credit of Nigerian educational developmentalism. The bureaucracy of Mass Education is thus well on its developmental way. Unfortunately this edu-business requires ten students in order to have four who will pass even at the minimum level. The other six will find it exceedingly difficult to obtain the jobs for which they had surely hoped. Furthermore having spent up to ten or more years in the education system they will have lost out on the intellectual and cultural training required for life and work in a traditional setting. These students and their families are not going to feel that they have been well served by their government. This is the crisis, Mass Education without the corresponding education for the masses.

The reasons for this failure are a much debated topic. Three possible causes are almost always mentioned in any discussion of this topic. They are poor students, poor teachers, and poor facilities. Certainly all three can seriously hurt educational progress but it is unlikely that any is the fundamental reason for educational failure in Nigeria. To blame the students or the teachers is really to beg the question. It would not be inaccurate to say that one of the

functions of education is to make good students out of poor ones. Furthermore "poor students" is a perennial excuse used by virtually every generation. Such a kneejerk excuse can have little credence. On the other hand to blame the teachers is equally foolish. Again it begs the question since all of the teachers were once students themselves. Which comes first good teachers or good education?

There is some validity in blaming the Nigerian school facilities which are often poor. There is a chronic shortage of books, desks, chalkboards, etc.; but poor facilities need not pre-empt learning. One must remember that many of Africa's learned and respected elder statesmen received their early education in schools which by today's standards indeed were very poorly equipped. Early mission schools all had poor facilities yet most children who attended them learned to read, write and do sums. Similarily traditional Islamic schools succeed without the modern paraphernalia of education.

Misapplications in Developmentalism

Poor teachers and poor facilities are symptomatic of a more fundamental problem. One must consider the nature of the philosophy from which educational practice is derived. Although the appropriateness of developmentalism as a philosophy of education in developing nations is apparent, because it is basically an economic philosophy it lends itself to misapplication in two critical ways. These misapplications are the root of the current problem.

The first misapplication is that the concept of factory or industrial plant and raw material is equated with school and pupil. In the broader arena of development one of the crucial issues is the

transfer of technology and the development of the necessary societal infrastructure that will allow technology to take root. Nevertheless if one has a trained crew a factory can be successfully operated within a non-technical society, e.g. consider some of the soft drink factories in remote areas of Nigeria. It is thought that the same can be done with schools. Perhaps on a very small scale where there is little impact on a community it can be done; but certainly not with mass education schemes like UPE. To begin with a school is much more a labour-intensive affair, and indeed the labourers must be highly skilled, than is any factory. No developing nation today has enough qualified teachers to effectively run schemes like UPE. Secondly and more importantly schools are far more dependent upon communities than are factories, which often can operate virtually inspite of a community. For one thing the adults of a community are not going to feel about raw materials going into a factory the way they feel about their children going into a school. For extensive education to be successful a certain harmony must exist between what happens with a child at home before entering school and with what happens later in the classroom. If the harmony is not there then many parents will simply not send their children to school. When a child does go something of his community goes with him into the classroom. If that something is opposed or even ambivalent towards school then the whole process of education suffers. Mass education can only be fruitful if it serves the values and aspirations of the people in the communities.

The second misapplication of the economic model of developmentalism is the use of utilitarian measures of success. Hallam Liman Cirona, C.F.R., has written of Nigeria that "...our concept of

education (is) as an utilitarian tool to secure better economic life rather than its unique value in self-improvement, making a person whole." In industry one wants to know how many kilowatts of power are being generated, how many tonnes of steel produced, have the economic projections been met? In education it is how many students are enrolled, how many degrees are being granted, are the manpower projections being met? Not that these are unnecessary in education, only that they should be secondary to the quality and process of ecucation. To make them paramount leads among other things to: rote learning and more concern for passing exams than with understanding disciplines at the student level; an over emphasis of syllabuses and automatic promotions at the school level; and the proliferation of schools beyond the capacity for their support at the ministry and government levels. This last point is perhaps the most crucial. It can be likened to health officials who when facing an epidemic with only one tenth the minimum vaccine needed decide to dilute the vaccine tenfold. The vaccine is now useless and those who do survive the epidemic are only those who would have survived anyway. Other people hearing about this are not likely to trust the health officials in the future! So it is with dilute education.

To recapitulate the presence of poor teachers, facilities, etc. is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem which is the misapplication of certain aspects of economic developmentalism to educational developmentalism. The first misapplication results in a reductionistic, over-simplified view of schooling and education; the second places the measure of educational success squarely on quantity rather than on quality. The net result in Nigeria is that the edu-business has

burgeoned out far beyond the society's capacity to adjust to, absorb, support and maintain quality education. Again one has Mass Education but not an education for the masses.

The tragedy of it all is that the edu-business squanders a large portion of Nigeria's wealth at the expense of the common man. Fewer people will be willing to support schools which so poorly serve them. Many may simply boycott the schools as some are doing now (e.g. nomadic groups like the Fulani); but the vast sums of money involved in education may someday cause others to react more demonstratively. The tragedy is that even if students continue in school the low quality of education will not serve the development purposes of the national planners. The processes of industrialization and modernization are hurting now and will continue to suffer for the lack of human capital. The tragedy is that continued poor education will further widen class stratification. Not all Nigerian schools are equal. There are some very good schools but generally they are attended only by the sons and daughters of the influential and wealthy. As the gap between the good schools of the elite and the poor schools of the masses widens the class distinctions solidify.

As real as these difficulties are they should not be seen as refuting the philosophy of educational developmentalism. The concept of human capital development is well founded but problems arise when extensive funding is available. Extensive funds allow for quick action; unfortunately what is done quickly is often done carelessly. Nigeria which has extensive funds must take care to ensure that the desired results in human capital development are being achieved by the means she has employed. Currently the proliferation of schools, the importation of foreign teachers, the large sums of money spent

are resulting in a well established edu-business bureaucracy, true enough; but the education being offered to the masses is largely specious. The desired ends can best be achieved if the edu-business growth rate is reduced so that limited and valuable indigenous resources are not dissipated and so that quality can overtake quantity as the more important of two critical gauges of success. The people in the villages deserve better than what they are receiving today.